

February 15, 2005

Secretary Mike Chrisman
The Resources Agency
1416 Ninth St. Suite 1311
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: CEQA Improvement Advisory Group

Dear Secretary Chrisman:

Sierra Club California is pleased to accept your invitation to participate in the CEQA Advisory Group that the Resources Agency is convening. To shortcut some verbiage, Sierra Club California endorses the outline of improvements submitted to you by PCL, ULI, and SVMG (letter of 2/16/05). We have been in discussions with these groups and other environmental groups for some time about these concepts and we are comfortable moving forward with these as a starting point. The key issue for us in this approach is that we are not isolating CEQA as the sole area in need of streamlining or strengthening. CEQA is frequently unfairly and inaccurately blamed by the development and extraction industries as a main cause of high housing prices, lumber prices, etc. We hope you agree that CEQA is not the culprit and actually is a major benefit to Californians and local governments; I have information that backs up this point if you or your staff is interested. It is my hope that we will not have to spend the Advisory Group's time defending what has been a stellar law for California.

In the larger picture, we hope this effort does not remain as a starting point. What I mean by that is that there have been calls for doing more "smart growth" for a long time. A cornucopia of suggestions about how to manage our growth better have emerged from a series of task forces, blue ribbon commissions, stakeholder groups, and advisory panels over the last three decades. As I testified before Senator Torlakson's Transportation and Housing Committee last week (hearing on linking transportation and housing), we don't need to study the problem any more. Instead, we need solutions now.

In the Schwarzenegger administration, "action" is the watchword. We like that attitude and Sierra Club California is eager to engage with the Resources Agency and the entities you are bringing to the table to make progress on growth management sooner than later, as the clock keeps ticking on saving open space, farmland, habitat, and in cleaning up the air and water.

Sincerely,

Bill Allayaud
State Director